

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

SCIENCE FICTION

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FEATURING
**SEED OF
VIOLENCE**
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by JAY
WILLIAMS

**OPERATION
CASSANDRA**
A Novelet
by MIRIAM
ALLEN DE FORD

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SIEGEL

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nerves

by . . . Christopher Anvil

There is a strange theory that Martians are incapable of emotions such as those we have. This is not true.

THE Martian paused at the doorway and looked in. Bathed in the light of Mars' two moons, he saw her, locked in the arms of the Earthman. Her face was that of his wife. He turned, and his tall slender form moved away from the building, casting two shadows in the light of the moons.

He saw the Earthman next at breakfast. But before he saw him, he saw his wife. And she did not come to breakfast.

"Where's Rita?" asked the Earthman.

"Reeta is indisposed," said the Martian pleasantly. "Perhaps she will go with us to the spaceport, but I cannot tell. When she wakes with a headache, it sometimes lasts all day."

"Too bad," said the Earthman. He tapped absently on the bare wood of the table.

"Here," said the Martian, holding out a dish of curled reddish flakes, "do you like *berra* meat?"

"No. Thanks, I don't care for any." The Earthman frowned. "Rita said she'd be here for breakfast."

"Ah?" said the Martian. "When did she say that?"

There has been a good deal of speculation about the identity of Christopher Anvil. Suffice it that his stories have appeared in most of the magazines, and in Playboy (under another name), that he likes chess, lives in the country (in New York State), and was practically snowed under, he reports, this winter.

The Earthman opened his mouth and closed it. He had been about to say, "Last night."

"The reason I ask," said the Martian, taking a curl of *berra* meat delicately in his finger, "is because of Reeta's extraordinary memory. We Martians do not make a statement of future intent, and then not carry it out. It is a point of courtesy with us. Surely you know this."

"That's right," said the Earthman, remembering.

"Therefore, if she said she would be here, even with a headache she would be here. With myself," the Martian shook his head regretfully, "it is often different. My memory is often at fault." He crunched the *berra* meat with relish.

"I think I would like some of that," said the Earthman. He took some of the meat. "I guess I was wrong about Rita. I probably heard her wrong."

"Most probably," said the Martian.

The Earthman looked at him intently, but the thin Martian face was pleasant. "You know," said the Earthman, "it's been pleasant here. Before I left home, I didn't know. You hear so many stories about Martians. You know, about how tricky and subtle Martians are. But what the heck, Martians are just like anyone else." He smiled a sudden secret smile. "Yes, sir, just *exactly* like anyone else. Taller and thinner, is all." He took a

handful of the *berra* meat and crunched loudly. "—Good stuff," he said.

The Martian winced faintly, then smiled. "Yes, it is surprising. We have much the same physical form, much the same mental capacity. There is probably more variation among two races on Earth than between Earth and Mars. We can eat the same food and have the same diseases. It is surprising."

"Sure is," said the Earthman. He settled back and signaled to the manservant for some more of the strange mint-flavored coffee.

The Martian was leaning back, smoking an aromatic cigarette. His eyes looked into the distance as he spoke. "Yes, it is strange, the similarity in us. The same emotions. —Love, hate, jealousy. Tempered, perhaps, a little more by the passage of time and the aging of the race. Carried out, perhaps, a little more in the sphere of the mind than in that of the body. We are the same in body, though."

"Yes," the Earthman put in, grinning with half of his face.

"Yes," agreed the Martian, still looking off into space. He breathed out twin plumes of the aromatic smoke. "There is, however, a danger there, which we so far have held in check.

"What's that?"

"Disease." The Martian's hawk-like eyes touched impersonally on the Earthman and then glanced away.

"Why's that?" asked the Earth-

man, feeling strangely chilled. "What about disease?"

The Martian hesitated. "Well," he said finally, "we are an older race." He ground out his cigarette.

"So?" said the Earthman. "What of it?"

"Diseases which have become benign in us, due to an immunity acquired over the ages, might become virulent in your race."

"Oh. We haven't got the immunity yet. But, our scientists—"

The Martian rose. "We must not stay chatting till you miss your ship. Excuse me a moment." He left the room and the Earthman heard him speaking in low, considerate tones, but could not make out the words.

"Reeta is still sick," said the Martian coming back into the room. "It is one of her headaches. She will be over it tomorrow. I asked her of her promise to be with us this morning. She remembered nothing of it. —Curious."

"My mistake," said the Earthman, laughing a little unnaturally.

The Martian shrugged. "My own mistake as well. If we had not gone to the fireshow last night, she would have no headache, and be with us today. Oh well, let us go. I have had Fernand see to your goods. You have the contract with you, I suppose?"

The Earthman frowned, patted his breast pocket absently and heard the crinkle of paper. He accompanied the Martian through the short central hall with its latticed

screen to the outside. The air was brisk but the sun was warm.

"A pleasant day," said the Martian. "A little hot, perhaps." He crossed to the peculiar, many-wheeled vehicle the Martians used for traveling, and slid up a door. He motioned the Earthman in, then sat down beside him. The machine jolted into motion and something clattered to the floor.

"What's this?" said the Earthman, picking up a small metal disc. He accidentally touched a stud, and it flew open, showing a small blue-tinted mirror, and something that looked like rouge.

The Martian glanced over at it. "Reeta's compact," he said. "I suppose she forgot it at the fireshow last night. Your women use those too, don't they?"

"Yes," said the Earthman, frowning. The fireshow. They had offered to take him there. That is, his host had offered to. But he had thought that he saw something else in the eyes of his hostess, something far more worthwhile than the fireshow. He had said he thought he would go to bed, since he had to leave the next day. He had seen the promise in Rita's eyes. And she had kept that promise. Then how could his host talk of the fireshow? Rita could not be two places at once.

The vehicle was crawling forward at what the Martians considered a good speed. The Martian was admiring the scenery. "Beau-

tiful," he was saying. "This is the best time of the year."

"Yes," said the Earthman. "Uh, about the fireshow. What time was that last night?"

"As always, at midnight," said the Martian. "Are you regretting that you missed it?"

"Sort of," said the Earthman. He was thinking that it had been shortly before midnight when he went for his short walk. She had been waiting at the flowering shrubs. They had gone back together, wordlessly. Midnight. This was impossible. "How long did the show last?"

"About three hours," said his host. "We didn't stay to see the end, though. We'd only been there an hour-and-a-half when Reeta complained of a pain over her eyes. The fireshow will do that to some people, you know."

But the Earthman was staring out the window. They passed a small Martian house surrounded by flowers. Rita, looking strangely pale, was standing among the flowers, putting some in a slender vase. She waved good-bye. "Why, there's Rita!" cried the Earthman.

His host turned slowly and glanced back. He shook his head. "I tell you frankly," he said, "I am glad you are leaving."

The Earthman stared at him.

"That," said the Martian, "was not Reeta. You may have noticed the difference in complexion."

"Why, she *was* pale. But, who was it?"

"I have never told you. Perhaps I should have. That was Reeta's twin."

The Earthman felt as if his head were spinning. "Why didn't I ever meet her?"

"It is a story I do not want to get out. You must agree not to tell."

"Well, sure, if you want me to."

"Very well. Reeta's sister, is well, somewhat wanton. She was brought up with her sister, they are like each other in appearance, but Neena had some unfortunate experiences as a girl. She is overly friendly with men."

"Oh." It crossed the Earthman's mind that perhaps the mixup about the fireshow was not so strange after all. "Well," he said, "I won't repeat it."

"It was not that that I wished you not to repeat." The Martian was looking straight ahead at the road.

"Oh? What was it, then?"

The Martian seemed to speak with some difficulty. "On Earth, you have the common cold, as it is called. We are, you know, immune to that here."

"Yes, I've heard that."

"You may not have heard that we have other diseases which are to us as your common cold is to you. They are irritating while they last, but they pass and we, with our acquired immunity, recover. While they last, however, we must avoid contact with Earthmen. The diseases are more violent with them."

A chill seemed to have entered the vehicle.

"Neena," the Martian went on, "came down with a mild case of one of these Martian colds. This was what I did not tell you. Perhaps I should have. Suppose you had chanced to come down this way, and she in her thoughtless carelessness had spoken to you?" The Martian shivered.

"What," asked the Earthman hollowly, "did she have?"

"I do not know the name. My memory is not good. On Earth it produces sores—hideous. I have even been told limbs drop off."

Terrified, the Earthman sat up straight.

The Martian glanced at him. "Come," he said comfortingly. "Relax yourself. She will get over it. It is not so severe here. I told you, with us it is like a cold. But you see, I do not wish this to get around. Our trade with Earth is mutually profitable. A misunderstanding on this could ruin it."

"Yes," said the Earthman in a haunted voice. "You don't—you don't remember the name of this disease?"

"Ah, my memory is not too good. Reeta would know. It is a shame she could not come. —Headaches are not catching."

"That's good to know," said the Earthman. "Look, this 'cold'—would a person from Earth be likely to catch it? I mean—the odds?"

"We have not experimented," said the Martian dryly. He swung

the many-wheeled vehicle onto the edge of the landing field. "I must leave you here. It has been a pleasure having you, my friend. I hope the contract will be satisfactory to everyone."

"Yes," said the Earthman faintly. "I'm sure it will." He looked off at the ship that was to carry him home. But he did not look happy. He looked as if he had gone hollow inside.

On the way back, the Martian stopped at the small house surrounded with flowers. He called inside.

"Why," demanded the slender, pale-faced woman who came to the door, "did you make me come down here just now? Why did you make me wear this horrid chalky face-whitener?"

Her husband spoke with a softness that was like velvet over a sword. "I know about last night, Reeta."

His wife caught her breath.

Her husband turned to the smiling woman who walked out to greet him. "I am sorry, Mohain," he said gently. "We must go home, now. Perhaps you will come up tonight with your husband?"

"Ah, he only takes me out once a week," the woman laughed, "and last night it was to the fireshow. Did you see it?"

"Alas," said the Martian, with a faint tinge of a smile, "unfortunately, we did not."

With a heavy rumble, the Mars-Earth spaceship passed overhead.